

# Influence Factors on Education Development in Appalachian Kentucky

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## Abstract:

Any study on Appalachia must be interdisciplinary. Without understanding the historical, sociological, anthropological, geographical, cultural, and socioeconomic underpinnings and their interconnections, one cannot understand Appalachia. This study examines those interconnections.

## Introduction

As my husband drove the narrow winding road through the “bottom” between the mountains in Martin County, Kentucky, I peered through the car window at all the green. Everything seemed a vibrant green, and the intense color shot straight up. Leaves, weeds, grass, flowers, moss, all green. A calm came over me, my body relaxed completely. Memories flooded out from deep within me... I was home. Not home in the sense that I was born and raised here, but home in the sense that it was exactly like this.

Familiarity shut out any feelings of peculiarity. Porch-swingers waved as we drove by and we waved back. Houses, rather house trailers, seemed stacked on top of each other as they climb up the “hollers”. Old, rusty trailers have replaced shacks, I thought. Yet, the small front yards still harbored junk cars, trucks, rusty washing machines, and “stuff”. Refuse still clung to the sides of the hills. Old tires were scattered throughout the river and roadside ditch banks. I haven’t lived in Kentucky for twenty-seven years, and all that had changed was the introduction of house trailers. In every other way, time seemed to have almost stood still.

We stopped at a small grocery-gas station to buy a “bottle of pop”. I chose diet coke, but my husband had to have Ale8, which is only produced and sold in eastern Kentucky. As I chatted with the cashier, I realized my speech had changed. A stronger country twang had emerged, and I was saying phrases like “I ain’t gonna”, “I reckon”, “pert near” and “over yonder”. Yep, I was home.

Signs of extreme poverty were everywhere, and the people looked harsh, aged, and worn. Life here is still hard on a body. The small towns, villages really, are old and dirty. Side streets and driveways are still not paved or rock covered; that costs too much money. Rain doesn’t wash the dirt away, it only changes the dirt to mud. We drove through town to the district school office in Inez, county seat of Martin County. I organized my notes and thoughts, got out of the car, and went in for my interviews wondering, “What will I find and what will the people tell me, or will they tell me nothing?” I am well aware of the “telling of the story” characteristic in the mountains; a typical question and answer session will produce little information. I must pose a subject, and sit back and let them talk. Luckily, the people characteristically said plenty with customarily few words. And I listened carefully. Their words were folksy and so familiar; I felt fortunate to

hear them. In my preliminary trip to Kentucky in the summer of 2000, I talked with subjects who confirmed much of my collected research data and highlighted new areas to consider. In this paper, however, I discuss a historical review of the research.

Appalachian Kentucky has a long history of poverty and subsistence living that has permeated every facet and social structure of the culture, including education. In reality, poverty has actually postponed and delayed the development of public education, as well as contributed to nonparticipation in the education system by much of the population well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century (McVey 1949). “Livin’s more important than schoolin’ ” is not only a powerful and emotional statement by one mountain woman, but also a concise statement that condenses a complex socioeconomic situation into the realities and priorities of mountain life (Reck & Reck 1980, p. 19).

Four books that are considered necessary background reading before beginning any project in Appalachian studies are *Appalachia on Our Mind* (Shapiro 1978), *Yesterday’s People* (Weller 1965), *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers* (Eller 1982) and *Night Comes to the Cumberland* (Caudill 1963). These four sources are consistently cited in the majority of the literature on Appalachia. All give a wonderfully rich and contextual description of the Appalachian culture including: geography’s contribution to physical and social isolation; the relationship and bond of the people to the land; the value and meaning of kinship and family ties; the relevance and irrelevance of schooling; reasons for stagnant economic development; distrust of outsiders and government officials above the local level; powerlessness and reluctance to change; acceptance of poverty; the significance of fatalism and religion in the sociological and psychological make-up of the people; and the apparent damage of political and economic exploitation. A full understanding of how all of these cultural characteristics are intertwined is necessary to any study concerning Appalachia (Ball 1969; Billings 1974; DeYoung 1995; Fisher 1977; Gaventa 1977; Lewis 1970; Miller 1977). Consequently, these interconnections also make the study of just one characteristic very difficult.

The purpose of this paper is to look at the connections between poverty and education in three counties of Appalachia Kentucky through first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, determine the causes of that poverty, and

consider the impact that poverty has had on education. The three counties are Martin, Pike, and Letcher. Hopefully, the personal interviews/oral histories and historical documents search I conducted in the summer of 2000 in eastern Kentucky will further illuminate my understanding of poverty's influence on education.

This literature review uses interdisciplinary sources and data to determine categories, themes, and patterns. I hope to illustrate multiple perspectives, as well as provide corroborating evidence on collected data (Creswell 1998; Denzin & Lincoln 1998). The data search was drawn from the fields of history, education, psychology, sociology, and anthropology. The story of poverty's effect on education in Appalachian Kentucky is very complicated and would be incomplete without an interdisciplinary approach to fully realize the social and economic underpinnings and ramifications of that poverty. I have written a narrative that combines historical and qualitative research methodology, which hopefully tells the story of a segment of Appalachian people and their struggle with poverty, as well as education.

### **Historical and Sociological Overview**

Kentucky's education history could be described as proud or shameful, progressive or backward, essential or unnecessary, ethical or corrupt, broad-minded or sectarian, and each description would be in some part truthful. Contributing factors producing such ambiguities in Kentucky's education history lie in differences: geographical differences, urban-rural differences, and economic/class differences. Unfortunately, the negative side of all these differences was found in the mountains.

The first settlers to the Kentucky mountains were the English, the Scottish, and the Irish. They were a strong and stubborn lot, opinionated and often cruel (McVey 1949; Weller 1965). This collective group reflected the perennial frontiersmen, interested in freedom from the restraints of law, order, and a differing culture. Settling into wealth, comfort, and benefits of a regulated society was not their dream or preference (Caudill 1963; Weller) People who settled in the mountains were rugged, ingenious, and wanted to be left alone. When commerce, industry, and education were growing and developing in many parts of the nation as well as Kentucky, little of this progress found its way into the mountains (Clark 1997; Shapiro 1978). The mountaineers did not want change. For this reason, all they have to show for their struggles are generations of isolation, poverty, inadequate schools, and government neglect.

Appalachian Kentucky had a "closed door" culture that was historically and fiercely independent. Independence gradually became staunch individualism. The "public good" was of no interest unless it coincided with "private good". Subsequently, the Appalachian people became existence-oriented rather than improvement-oriented (Shapiro 1978; Weller 1965). This traditional status quo held a certain comfort; change was feared. Fatalism and religious fundamentalism became major psychological mind-sets to deal with the harshness

of the land, the consequences of poverty, and the physical isolation (Caudill 1963; Clark 1997; McVey 1949; Weller).

The poor and rural mountainous areas received no money or attention from the state to build schools or an education system. The politicians and the wealthy, which were usually synonymous, lived predominantly in populated urban counties, held the real power in the state, and totally ignored the poor Appalachians (McVey 1949). Monies earmarked for roads throughout the state always seemed to disappear or dry up before ever making it to the mountain counties. No roads continued the isolation. The state's partiality to more populated cities and neglect of the mountain counties continued well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Deskins 1994; Shapiro 1978).

Kentuckians' overarching concerns from the very beginning of statehood in 1792 were land titles and property rights (Ligon 1942; McVey 1949; Shapiro 1978). The politicians had good reason to focus such an inordinate amount of attention to the subject of land titles and property rights. From revolutionary days to statehood, land surveyors and speculators representing the wealthy, acquired large tracts of land through congressional grants. Thus, most of the land, at least the good land, had been taken by the time large numbers of settlers began to arrive in Kentucky after the Revolutionary War. The situation turned serious and complicated as a result of squatters and multiple fraudulent titles on land sold to the settlers illegally by the unscrupulous (McVey 1949). The first state constitution of 1792 addressed the land title problems by giving the Court of Appeals the jurisdiction to settle land and title disputes, an act very unusual and not practiced in most states. Due to bribes and wealthy families' political control in most counties, the wealthy had advantage in the courts, forcing the ousted settlers to acquire less desirable land on which to settle and make a living. Consequently, a class system was in place in Kentucky from the very beginning of statehood (McVey 1949).

A social climate was established in Kentucky whereby land ownership was all-important, yet titles were often questionable. The disputes packed the court system. This led to an undercurrent of distrust and suspicion by the poor settlers for the upper class and government officials, whom they saw as corrupt. Such a guarded and distrustful atmosphere haunted much of Kentucky for a century and a half, and still exists in many of Kentucky's mountain counties. In fact, dozens of the Kentucky feuds were fought between families over political power and control. The legal system of the state was not trusted (Pierce 1994; Weller 1988).

Most counties in Kentucky were named and their boundaries drawn by powerful families of the county. These elites held much of the counties' land and the political offices, maintaining their power through kinship ties for decades, and perpetuating a system of political power of the "haves" over the powerless "have-nots" (Halperin 1990). Thus, public education was not a priority or even considered important by the majority of the population. The wealthy provided an education for their children and the poor had no use or respect for "book

learning". Unfortunately, public apathy concerning education continued for many years (Ligon 1942; McVey 1942). Public education was not a seriously considered issue until the early 1900s.

The first two state constitutions of 1792 and 1799 made no mention or provision for public education (McVey 1949). The educated men who settled in Kentucky believed education was only for the elite, not the common man. In fact, the majority of Kentucky citizens, rich or poor, felt that education was a private matter and not the business of the state to furnish free education at public expense. Priorities considered more important than education at this time included: settling land title disputes, clearing the land and making a living, establishing a stable banking system, land laws and court system, promoting economic development, and maintaining a strong opposition to taxes (Clark 1997). The people simply did not realize the value or utility of education (Ligon 1942).

McVey (1949), Ligon (1942), and Clarke (1997) consistently referred to this negative public attitude concerning public education. Consequently, public schools were not funded by the state until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in 1904, one hundred twelve years after statehood. Sadly, this would not be the end of political inaction and malfeasance in the progress and development of a public school system throughout Kentucky, especially in Appalachia. Poverty, subsistence farming, and lack of transportation delayed the development of education in the Kentucky mountains much longer than the rest of the state (Deskins 1994).

Public education in Appalachian Kentucky developed differently from the rest of Kentucky for a myriad of reasons, most importantly isolation, poverty, and sparse population. Politics and the lack of economic development have kept these influences stagnant for most of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Billings 1974; Silver & DeYoung 1986). Consequently, education has tremendously suffered with little remedy provided or even available. Education and poverty have always been interdependent issues in Appalachia, and these two issues have also been significant in the construction of Appalachian culture.

### **Appalachian Culture**

Appalachia is a descriptive term that means different things to different people, depending on whether you are an outsider or have roots in the area. The most common assessment of Appalachia by outsiders is of a poor, isolated, mountain people with too many children, little or no formal education, and barely making a hardscrabble living in an inhospitable environment (Weller 1965). As with most stereotypes, there is an element of truth to this characterization, but little understanding of the people, their environment, or their circumstances.

The geography of Appalachian Kentucky has always been problematic and greatly responsible for determining a particular way of life. The mountains on the eastern boundary of Kentucky range from 4,000 to 5,000 feet elevation and are covered with thick forests. The only

arteries of transportation were the valley floors between the mountains and the natural waterways. Natural waterways were only usable in the summer and fall because of bad weather. The relief and steepness of the mountain slopes affected land use and was highly susceptible to erosion if trees were removed, making it difficult for cultivating crops (Shapiro 1978; Whisnant 1983; U.S. Dept. Agriculture 1970).

Appalachia's isolation began as physical isolation enforced by a rugged topography. The isolation eventually became mental and cultural, holding people in and keeping others out of the mountains, and preventing change or contact with the outside world. Many years of harsh and desperate living conditions encouraged and nourished fatalistic and fundamentalist religious beliefs, which encouraged the peoples' acceptance of these conditions as permanent and their lot in life (Shapiro 1978; Weller 1965). Moreover, the people no longer wanted change, nor would they accept change. The mountains and hollows isolated the people from the rest of Kentucky and the rest of the country, and the lack of flat land made only subsistence farming possible. All family members were needed for tending crops and farm animals, hunting and fishing, and taking care of younger children and household duties just to get by (Weller 1965).

Yet the people developed pride and rugged individualism through strong bonds of kinship and love of the land. Because each "holler" had its own family group, mistrust of outsiders was continued and reinforced (Caudill 1963). Little value was placed on "book learning" and a mountain fundamental and fatalistic religious faith developed that comforted, as well as encouraged, the acceptance of poverty and hardship (Pierce 1995). The family network of each hollow was practically self sufficient, giving little reason to "go to town", which could be a day's ride on horseback. Bartering with neighboring hollows provided needed and available goods and services. Life was hard in the mountains, but the mountaineers were happy and satisfied with their life (Weller 1965). Thus, a particular culture was created of a proud, rugged, and autonomous people with a mistrust of outsiders, strong bounds of kinship, little value placed on formal education, and a fundamental and fatalistic religious faith that comforted as well as encouraged the acceptance of poverty and hardship (Billings 1974; Eller 1982; Salstrom 1990; Shapiro 1978; Weller 1965).

Although the aforementioned Appalachian cultural characteristics have in some way affected the development of education, poverty has historically been the most consistent and salient factor shaping education in Appalachia, and remains so to a great extent even today (Gotts 1986; Silver & DeYoung 1985; Maggard 1990). Thus, isolation has been such an integral part of the story of poverty in the eastern mountains of Kentucky, there is tremendous difficulty separating the two. In fact, Professor Alan DeYoung at the University of Kentucky Appalachian Center, whose writings are probably cited more than any one writer on this subject, suggests that poverty and isolation are so entrenched in the rural Appalachian

mountains, that the economic problems causing the poverty may be unsolvable (1985). Historical research and economic analysis of the last one hundred fifty years appears to support such a pessimistic view of the circumstances.

Reasons for the continued poverty in the eastern Kentucky mountains can be separated into two categories: environmental influences and cultural influences (Billings 1977; DeYoung 1985; Friedman 1966; Gotts 1986; U.S. Dept. Agriculture 1935). Environmental reasons for the poverty include physical isolation and the ruggedness of the mountain terrain, lack of any economic development, and sparse population. In the case of Appalachian Kentucky, the isolation and rugged terrain have made the introduction of any economic development implausible, if not impossible. In the most rural counties there is literally no flat land, and a very limited number of possible employable workers (Ford 1962; Watson 1993).

Explanation of the cultural influences on continued poverty in Appalachia Kentucky is more complicated and debatable. This review does not address whether or not Appalachia is a culture or a subculture, or the merits of the existence of a "culture of poverty" (Friedmann 1966; Leacock 1971; Levine & White 1986; Valentine 1968). However, my underlying assumptions affirm a culture, and I am prepared to acknowledge certain cultural characteristics of the Appalachian people that have been most influential to their continued poverty and limited circumstances.

First, the Appalachians have always been impoverished compared to middle class American standards (Bradshaw 1992; Commission on Poverty 1968). One generation passed on to the next generation the lack of coping skills and acceptance of the impoverished condition (Lewis 1970). Education was not respected and there were no jobs available, so why continue an education? A fatalistic view of life, as well as fundamentalist religion developed a coping skill that perpetuated the acceptance of this "status quo". The close kinship ties prevented each consecutive generation from leaving the area to find work because giving up the lifestyle and security of family and the mountains was unthinkable to most. So the poverty persisted (Eller 1982; Weller 1965; Whisnant 1983).

An applicable metaphor for the poverty-education relationship could possibly be the "chicken or egg" dilemma. Solve poverty first and education problems will be resolved, or solve education problems first and poverty will be resolved. A third and perhaps realistic option might be asked, "Can either poverty or education problems be solved?" Without economic development the answer is absolutely no.

The literature is replete with statistics that show few Appalachian children score above average on standardized tests, and significantly more score below average when compared to non-Appalachian counties (Asher 1935; DeYoung, Vaught & Porter 1981; DeYoung 1985; Tickamyer & Tickamyer 1987; Watson 1993). Possible explanations given for the test score differences include environmental/cultural and economic/political

causes (Watson 1993). Three models presented in much of the literature do offer a structural framework and the theoretical underpinnings for the study and understanding of the powerful connection between poverty and education.

## Discussion

Appalachia has long been studied through two commonly used models: the environmental/cultural difference model and the colonialism/dependency model (Ball 1969; Billings 1974; Branscome 1971; DeYoung 1985; Gaventa 1977; Leacock 1971; Lewis 1970; Reck & Reck 1980; Salstrom 1990; Weller 1965). These two models attempt to elaborate and explain the Appalachian subculture, as well as describe the psychological/sociological/economical/political inner-workings of the people. Both models encompass a historic overview and perspective that appear appropriate and necessary for full understanding of how poverty has influenced education in the mountains of eastern Kentucky.

## Environmental/Cultural Difference Model

The environmental/cultural difference model has experienced numerous name changes over the years (i.e., subculture model [Ball 1969; DeYoung 1995; DeYoung et al. 1981; Valentine 1968], cultural deprivation model [DeYoung et al. 1981], culture deficiency model [Lewis 1970; Reck & Reck 1980], and culture of poverty model [Billings 1974; DeYoung et al. 1981; Leacock 1971; Levine & White 1986; Valentine 1968; Whisnant 1983]). I will refer to the environmental/cultural model hereafter as the cultural difference model, which Valentine (1968) traced to Oscar Lewis. The model's basic premise describes how the values and norms of a culture pass from generation to generation through socialization. If the cultural norms and values are mountain-rural and poverty based, each generation appears to be unable to accommodate changing conditions in order to take advantage of opportunities for improvement and modernization (DeYoung et.al 1981; Levine & White 1986; Valentine 1968).

DeYoung (1985) further described the cultural difference model as a result of values resistant to change in which local ties to the land and reliance on extended family for support, among other values, insulate the people from pressures to accept mainstream norms. Therefore, change is considered unacceptable by many Appalachians because it may not be consistent with long-held values and norms. My greatest concern as a researcher is to not just accurately document the influence of poverty in the development of education in three counties, but to also describe the influence in proper context with the culture; a culture that is not known or understood by "outsiders". Researchers cannot judge, describe, or make conclusions concerning the value system of one class of people by comparing them to another value system and class of people, which is exactly what has been done when Appalachia is compared to other urban or suburban populations.

Characteristics of Appalachian culture are often depicted in the somewhat dramatic and destructive traits of

traditionalism and fatalism, which portray Appalachians as passive and apathetic carriers of their culture (Anderson 1964; Ball 1969; DeYoung et. al 1981; DeYoung 1983; Eller 1982; Ford 1962; Lewis 1970; Reck & Reck 1980; Whisnant 1983). Ball describes a fascinating portrait of the Appalachia people as an *analgesic* subculture, unwilling as well as unable to deal with change or improve their condition because of *nonrational* responses to their circumstances. This position apparently assumes that normal behavior should be rational, and that nonrational responses may cause one to be inflexible, nonadaptive, unmotivated, and not goal oriented. Life for many in the mountains has been an experience of overwhelming problems, challenges, and frustrations (Deskins 1994; McVey 1949). Thus, the conceptualizations and cultural themes of fatalism, powerlessness, traditionalism, and religious fundamentalism act as pain relievers or analgesics to the conditions and circumstances in which the mountain people have found themselves for generations (Ball 1969; Lewis 1970; Reck & Reck 1980).

### Colonial/Dependence Model

The colonialism/dependence model reflects a political power structure of domination over a geographic area, most often by a person or group of a different race and/or culture. Since domination is both political and economic, the "colony" is left subordinate and dependent upon the dominating entity (Branscome 1971; DeYoung 1985; Gaventa 1977; Lewis 1970; Reck & Reck 1980; Salstrom 1994). Helen Lewis explicitly states that Appalachia is a subsociety that is structurally alienated by the coal industry and the dominant culture, and lacking the resources to change the condition due to colonialism and exploitation. In this context, Appalachia is rich in natural resources, yet the people are financially poor due to exploitation by the absentee ownership of coal companies, and the huge tracts of land as well as the underground mineral rights that were signed away by the people at the turn of the century (Eller 1982; McVey 1949; Shapiro 1978; Weller 1965).

Psychological and behavioral characteristics of the people due to the colonialism/dependency are similar to the cultural difference model, including the traits of fatalism and passivity. However, in the colonialism/dependence model, these traits are considered reactions and behavioral adjustments to the feelings of powerlessness, rather than characteristics that are passed through cultural transmission (Gaventa 1980). Nevertheless, both models attempt to explain why people behave the way they do (Whisnant 1983).

Unlike the cultural model, the colonial model implies a solution to the economic conditions: remove the exploitation and domination, and the people will no longer be dependent, passive or powerless (Branscome 1971; Gaventa 1977; Lewis 1970). This change would in turn encourage economic growth. However, this result has not been the case in Appalachia, as in similar populations in other parts of the world (Levine & White 1986). Certain background information on eastern Kentucky's coal

industry is necessary to the full understanding of its impact on the culture and the economy.

Coal was known to be in the mountains as early as the Civil War. Nevertheless, there were no big mining operations because there was absolutely no transportation network to move the coal out of the mountains, let alone to urban markets. The only mining that existed was locally owned which just supplied the local area (Clark 1997). In the late 1800s, passage of the infamous *broad form deed* into law impacted the lives and changed the development of Kentucky mountain people forever (McVey 1949; Shapiro 1978).

The broad form deed addressed the purchase of mineral rights on a section of land for a set one-time fee, and is the historical reason for the low tax base in coal counties (Clark 1997; Deskins 1994; McVey 1949). In brief, the broad form deed made all underground resources that could be mined tax-exempt. This one act allowed millions and millions of dollars worth of coal to leave the state without contributing any monies to the local county's tax base. Subsequently, absentee corporations hired locals to represent them and buy the mineral rights on tens-of-thousands of acres at \$.50 to \$1.00 an acre (Deskins 1994). One example is Pocahontas Inc., a huge land development company in Virginia that bought the mineral rights to 50% of the land in Martin County (S. Boggs, personal communication, August 1, 2000).

Unfortunately, the mountain people originally had no misgivings with the broad form deed, and in some cases thought the absentee owners were silly for wanting to buy rocks in the dirt. Such thinking reflected their naiveté and lack of economic knowledge and sophistication to realize the losing situation in which they were placed (Caudill 1963). When the coal mining operations started production, the Appalachians were thrilled with the opportunity for work and the ability to provide a better life for their families (Deskins 1994; Eller 1982). Gravel roads took the place of dirt paths, train tracks were laid, and the company-owned coal towns provided better homes, a variety of goods to purchase, schools, medical care, and entertainment options. Although the coal families' lives were socially, physically, and psychologically controlled by the coal companies, in reality they had never lived so well, at least on an economic level (Caudill). The negative consequences to coal mining and signing away mineral rights were yet to be realized (Clark 1997).

The negative consequences of the coal industry were realized with the first "bust" cycle. When work was gone, the workers and their families returned to their prior poverty. However, the most devastating and long-term act insuring continued poverty was the broad form deed. It not only made the sale of mineral rights legal, the coal companies did not have to pay any taxes on what came out of the ground (Clark 1997; McVey 1949; Shapiro 1978). Poor mountaineers paid property taxes on the land, but coal companies paid zero, which in turn meant no tax benefits for local communities and schools. The last boom cycle was in the 1960s and 1970s, however the industry has actually been in a bust cycle ever since (Clark 1997). The

broad form deed was finally repealed in the 1980s, too late to remedy the damage of the past.

Because of boom-and-bust trends in the coal industry in Kentucky and today's communication/industrial technology that has replaced human workers, the colonial model seems to have lost relevance and real meaning (personal communication, A. DeYoung, November 9, 2000; DeYoung 1985; 1989). Unfortunately, coal was the only resource in many of Kentucky's Appalachian counties, and the introduction of the welfare state by President Johnson's War on Poverty in the 1960s has just taken the place of the coal companies. The people are no longer dominated or exploited, yet they are still poor and dependent (Salstrom 1994).

### **Underdevelopment Model**

The third and more relatively recent model than the two models previously discussed is the underdevelopment model, which focuses directly on the effect poverty has had on the people and schools due to lack of economic development (DeYoung 1985). This model assumes that economic development in an area will not only lower poverty rates, but will in turn produce positive affects on education from increasing tax revenues. In other words, more money from economic development would not only be available for salaried workers, but also provide more tax money for education. Economic development brings higher standards of living, thus more of a need for education. DeYoung (1985; 1989) used comparative economic and educational data between Appalachian counties and non-Appalachian counties to test this assumption as well as determine strengths and weakness of each school system. DeYoung's results revealed that Appalachian counties (a) had fewer economic resources in which to fund education than non-Appalachian counties; (b) were almost entirely dependent on federal and state resources for school funding, not so for non-Appalachian counties; (c) spent less money per pupil for instruction than non-Appalachian counties; (d) have considerably more students scoring lower on ability and basic skills tests than non-Appalachian counties; and (e) have significantly lower percentages of students completing high school than non-Appalachian counties. These conclusions were strong evidence as to the negative effects of poverty and underdevelopment on education.

The overarching principle controlling DeYoung's (1985; 1989) education-economic indicators was the absence or lack of diversity within a county's economy, especially in manufacturing. More serious was the total absence of any prospects for new development. The underdevelopment model assumes a trickle-down solution: economic development would infuse money into the area, as well as the schools districts, thereby improving conditions in the classroom, improving schools' test scores, and lowering the dropout rate. Furthermore, education would be valued more if there were jobs available after the completion of high school (1985).

### **Conclusion**

Examination of the aforementioned models illuminates the complexities of differing perspectives of poverty's influence on education in Appalachian Kentucky. Unfortunately, solutions to the extreme poverty in certain counties in Appalachia have not been forthcoming. A culture has developed based largely on that poverty, and the economic circumstances needed to bring about meaningful change appear unavailable or impossible to implement. Time and the historical record reflect such a pessimistic conclusion.

Consequently, I contend that the cultural difference model is still an applicable model in which to frame my proposed historical study. The colonial/dependence and underdevelopment models are problematic because of inappropriateness for the present time, as well as for the future. Although the colonial/dependence model was at one time appropriate during the early coal industry economic booms, the coal industry has essentially been irrelevant, with little influence since the late 1970s.

The underdevelopment model appears theoretically appropriate because it advocates the increase of industry to build the economy. However, this model is practically inappropriate in the sparsely populated and remote mountainous areas of eastern Kentucky because of unlikely, if not impossible, economic development possibilities. Moreover, two hundred years of history support a fatalistic and negative perspective to such systemic poverty.

Appalachian Kentucky has had such a long history of systemic poverty and inadequate education; the two seem forever bound to one another. In the process of trying to understand the interconnections of the economical, social, and educational problems of Appalachia, the importance of the culture and physical environmental conditions cannot be overstated. A culture evolved from both the physical and social isolation of the people, which led to such cultural characteristics as strong family ties, reluctance to change, distrust for outsiders, acceptance of poverty, and little respect for schooling. LeVine and White (1986) classified these characteristics as typical in poor and rural populations throughout the world. 'Living is more important than schooling' definitely expressed priorities of daily living in particular areas of Appalachia (Reck & Reck 1980, p.19).

The cultural difference model also provides an appropriate framework to the understanding of how and why Appalachians think, feel, and act as they do. Historical research of the culture reveals the fatalism, and at times the helplessness of the people. Moreover, research appears to show that economic solutions and remedies that are appropriate in the urban or suburban environments may not be appropriate or even beneficial to the people in the Appalachian Mountains and their public schools.

The assumption has been that education would solve many of the economic problems of Appalachia by preparing the students for jobs (DeYoung 1989; DeYoung 1994). Prepare the students for what jobs? There are very

few work opportunities in the mountains and no economic development to provide new ones. This situation has been so longstanding that belief in education as a solution to economical and social problems has yet to be realized, not because of ignorance, but because of social and economic stagnation and a generational paralysis to change. Ironically, the largest employers in Martin, Pike, and Letcher counties are the school systems (S. Hardin, personal communications, July 31, 2000; B. Hopkins, August 1, 2000; D. Boggs, August 2, 2000).

Such conclusions remind me of my opening thoughts upon my return to the mountains – nothing had changed. Thus, the dilemma of solving education problems or poverty first remains unresolved. The crucial and more important question should be “Can poverty’s influence on education ever be eliminated in Appalachian Kentucky?” Two hundred years of history appear to say no. My greatest concern for Appalachia is that my supposition is correct: there are no realistic solutions to the poverty-education dilemma.

The literature search and data collection for this review revealed two unexpected findings. The amount of research, published studies, and journal articles concerning poverty’s affect on education were predominantly for urban/suburban communities. Rural education does not appear to draw much academic interest. Although I recognize there is a much larger school population in urban settings compared to rural populations, I was surprised in the lack of interest and the limited research for rural populations.

Additionally, my interviews with school administrators and teachers in Martin, Pike, and Letcher counties in the summer of 2000 provided information linking poverty and education to an area I had not considered at all: school reform policies and legislative acts. Every participant I spoke with considered school consolidation extremely costly, undesirable, and had not delivered the positive changes that had been anticipated. The participants’ arguments were strong and insightful. I believe further investigation on the effects of consolidation and other reform measures, as well as their impact on education, in Appalachia, is warranted. Interestingly, Diane Ravitch (2000) also mentioned consolidation problems, particularly in Appalachia recently, but gave no specifics.

At the end of my writing this review, I realized there was another glaring difference in Appalachian Kentucky education that jumped out of the pages. The biggest influences on education in this country the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were urbanization, industrialization, and emigration (Spring 1997; Westmeyer 1997). Obviously, this is not the case in Appalachia. There was no urbanization, little emigration, and only a temporary industrialization of sorts with coal mining. These observations alone indicate that education had to develop differently than the rest of the country. I certainly believe there is a multi-faceted story in the Appalachian Mountains that needs to be told, and I would be honored to tell that story.

## Final Thoughts

I began this paper with the personal reflections of my return to Appalachian Kentucky after living away from the state for twenty-seven years. As hard as I tried, I wanted my words to convey my emotions. However, I realize that mere words could not possibly convey my feelings, only my thoughts and observations. My return to Kentucky was extremely emotional, and my strongest reaction was that nothing had changed. Nothing. The same depths of poverty covered the “hollers” and backwoods. The rural people still behaved the same. The land was still rugged, underdeveloped, and breathtakingly beautiful. The people still talked the same way. There were still some cautious and unfriendly stares at “outsiders”, but many more friendly smiles and southern hospitality for those with roots in the mountains.

My overwhelming emotion that I could not seem to put into words was sadness...sadness for them. But more important than my emotions was *their* emotions. These people are not sad! These Kentuckians love their land and their life. They do not see life through the same lens as the rest of the world. They see poverty as a normal part of life, and quite frankly, as an honorable condition. They still laugh, play music, sing, “shake a leg”, tell tales, and wave from the porch as the world passes by. Most mountain people consider the outside world the sad place; they shake their head in disbelief at newspaper and television stories. Do they know something we don’t? If I have learned anything in this process, it is this: Appalachian Kentucky has not really changed – does not want to change – and will probably never change if past history is any indicator. Deep down, I realized that I knew this all along.

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